

VINAYA

The Four Disrobing Offences

This is the third article in the series about the Vinaya, the body of monastic rules and traditions binding on every Buddhist monk and nun. In this article I will discuss the four *Parajika* - the disrobing offences.

The core of the monastic discipline is a list of rules called the Patimokkha. In the bhikkhu-patimokkha (for the monks) there are 227 rules, while in the bhikkhuni-patimokkha (for the nuns) there are 311 rules. The first four rules in the patimokkha, for both monks and nuns, are the **four Parajika**. The word *parajika* (in the ancient Indian language called Pali) is usually translated as '*making the doer defeated*'. In effect it means that the offender **MUST DISROBE**. No ceremony or trial is required. From the instant the transgression is completed, the perpetrator automatically loses his or her status as a Buddhist monk or nun. Obviously these four rules were considered by the Buddha to be extreme violations of the spiritual ethic and a major obstacle in the path to enlightenment. They considered such gross behaviour on the part of a monk or nun that the penalty of disrobal was for life! Such a one could not simply re-ordain after a period of grace.

The four transgressions which incur a *Parajika*, the penalty of automatic disrobal, are as follows:

1. Engaging in sexual intercourse with another being of either sex.
2. Stealing something of value (which includes smuggling, cheating or deliberately avoiding payment of a tax).
3. Purposely killing a human being or encouraging him or her to commit suicide (this includes inciting another to murder somebody and it also includes convincing a woman to have an abortion).
4. Boasting that one has realised a high spiritual attainment, knowing that one is lying. For example, claiming to be enlightened, to be Maitreya Buddha, to have entered Jhana (deep meditation-ecstasy) or that one can read minds when one knows that one hasn't reached any of these states.

Should any monk or nun do any of these then you may know them as no longer holding the status of Buddhist monk or nun. They must disrobe. Should they attempt to hide their transgression and not disrobe then it is said that the bad karma produced is extreme indeed!

In these four disrobing offences there is no excuse for ignorance. In a story related in the Buddhist scriptures [1], a newly ordained monk who had not as yet been instructed in the Vinaya was cajoled by his former wife into having sexual intercourse with her. When he told the other monks of this, they approached the Buddha and asked what should be done. The Buddha decreed that the offending monk had to disrobe and in future all monks were to be told of the Four Things Not to be Done, the **four Parajika**, immediately after they have been ordained. Indeed, instructing the new monk in these four rules has now become part of the Ordination Ceremony itself. So there can be no excuse!

References

- [1] *Book of the Discipline*, volume 4, page 124